

Week Ending Friday, March 23, 2007

The President's Radio Address

March 17, 2007

Good morning. In times of war, Congress has no greater obligation than funding our war fighters. And next week, the House will begin debate on an emergency war spending bill.

The purpose of this legislation should be to give our troops on the frontlines the resources, funds, and equipment they need to fight our enemies. Unfortunately, some in Congress are using this bill as an opportunity to micromanage our military commanders, force a precipitous withdrawal from Iraq, and spend billions on domestic projects that have nothing to do with the war on terror.

Our troops urgently need Congress to approve emergency war funds. Over the past several weeks, our Nation has begun pursuing a new strategy in Iraq. Under the leadership of General David Petraeus, our troops have launched a difficult and dangerous mission to help Iraqis secure their capital. This plan is still in its early stages, yet we're already seeing signs of progress. Iraqi and American troops have rounded up more than 700 people affiliated with Shi'a extremists. They've also launched aggressive operations against Sunni extremists, and they've uncovered large caches of weapons that could have been used to kill our troops.

These are hopeful signs. As these operations unfold, they will help the Iraqi Government stabilize the country, rebuild the economy, and advance the work of political reconciliation. Yet the bill Congress is considering would undermine General Petraeus and the troops under his command just as these critical security operations are getting underway.

First, the bill would impose arbitrary and restrictive conditions on the use of war funds and require the withdrawal of forces by the end of this year if these conditions are not met. These restrictions would handcuff our

generals in the field by denying them the flexibility they need to adjust their operations to the changing situation on the ground. And these restrictions would substitute the mandates of Congress for the considered judgment of our military commanders.

Even if every condition required by this bill was met, all American forces, except for very limited purposes, would still be required to withdraw next year, regardless of the situation in Iraq. The consequences of imposing such an artificial timetable would be disastrous.

Here is what Secretary of Defense Robert Gates recently told Congress: Setting a fixed date to withdraw would "essentially tell the enemy how long they would have to wait until we're gone." If American forces were to step back from Baghdad before it is more secure, the scale and scope of attacks would increase and intensify. A contagion of violence could spill out across the entire country, and in time, this violence would engulf the region. The enemy would emerge from the chaos emboldened with new safe havens, new recruits, new resources, and an even greater determination to harm America. Such an outcome would be a nightmare for our country.

Second, the bill would cut funding for the Iraqi security forces if Iraqi leaders did not meet rigid conditions set by Congress. This makes no sense. Members of Congress have often said that the Iraqis must step forward and take more responsibility for their own security, and I agree. Yet Members of Congress can't have it both ways. They can't say that the Iraqis must do more and then take away the funds that will help them do so. Iraq is a young democracy that is fighting for its survival in a region that is vital to American security. To cut off support for their security forces at this critical moment would put our own security at risk.

Third, the bill would add billions of dollars in domestic spending that is completely unrelated to the war. For example, the House bill would provide \$74 million for peanut storage, \$48 million for the Farm Service Agency, and \$35 million for NASA. These programs do not belong in an emergency war spending bill. Congress must not allow debate on domestic spending to delay funds for our troops on the frontlines. And Members should not use funding our troops as leverage to pass special interest spending for their districts.

We are a nation at war, and the heaviest responsibilities fall to our troops in the field. Yet we in Washington have responsibilities as well. General Petraeus was confirmed by the Senate without a single vote in opposition, and he and his troops need these resources to succeed in their mission. Many in Congress say they support the troops, and I believe them. Now they have a chance to show that support in deed as well as in word. Congress needs to approve emergency funding for our troops, without strings and without delay. If they send me a bill that does otherwise, I will veto it.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 7:50 a.m. on March 16 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on March 17. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 17 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. In his address, the President referred to Gen. David H. Petraeus, USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Remarks on the Fourth Anniversary of the Invasion of Iraq

March 19, 2007

Good morning. Four years ago today, coalition forces launched Operation Iraqi Freedom to remove Saddam Hussein from power. They did so to eliminate the threat his regime posed to the Middle East and to the world. Coalition forces carried out that mission with great courage and skill. Today, the world is rid of Saddam Hussein, and a tyrant has been

held to account for his crimes by his own people.

Nearly 12 million Iraqis have voted in free elections under a democratic Constitution that they wrote for themselves. And their democratic leaders are now working to build a free society that upholds the rule of law, that respects the rights of its people, that provides them security, and is an ally in the war on terror.

At this point in the war, our most important mission is helping the Iraqis secure their capital. Until Baghdad's citizens feel secure in their own homes and neighborhoods, it will be difficult for Iraqis to make further progress toward political reconciliation or economic rebuilding, steps necessary for Iraq to build a democratic society.

So with our help, Iraq's Government is carrying out an aggressive plan to secure Baghdad. And we're continuing to train the Iraqi security forces so that they ultimately take full responsibility for the security of their own people.

I've just received an update on the situation from Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki. My conversation with the Prime Minister followed a briefing earlier this morning that included Secretary Rice and Secretary Gates, along with General Petraeus and Ambassador Khalilzad, who participated by video conference from Iraq.

Prime Minister Maliki and General Petraeus emphasized that the Baghdad security plan is still in its early stages, and success will take months, not days or weeks. Yet those on the ground are seeing some hopeful signs. The Iraqi Government has completed the deployment of three Iraqi Army brigades to the capital, where they've joined the seven Iraqi Army brigades and nine National Police brigades that were already in the area.

The Iraqi Government has also lifted restrictions that once prevented Iraqi and coalition forces from going into areas like Sadr City. American and Iraqi forces have established joint security stations. Those stations are scattered throughout Baghdad, and they're helping Iraqis reclaim their neighborhoods from the terrorists and extremists.

Together we've carried out aggressive operations against both Shi'a and Sunni extremists, carried out operations against Al Qaida